

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims**

Claims 1-11. (Canceled)

Claim 12. (Currently Amended): A mineral wool plant substrate comprising a coherent matrix of mineral wool, a cured binder, and a quantity of an ion-exchange agent comprising an ion-exchange capacity of at least about 15 meq/100g dry weight, wherein the ion-exchange agent is present in a maximum amount of 20 volume % and has a stable structure, exhibiting a non-clay like behavior with respect to swelling and shrinking, and further wherein the coherent matrix is formed by collecting a layer of mineral wool fibers that is cured by the binder, said cured binder fixing the fibers to one another so that they are substantially not displaceable relative to one another.

Claim 13. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent is a cation-exchange agent.

Claim 14. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent comprises soil minerals.

Claim 15. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent has a non-clay like behavior with respect to swelling and shrinking .

Claim 16. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent has an average pore size of less than 25  $\mu\text{m}$ .

Claim 17. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent comprises a zeolite.

Claim 18. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 12, further comprising an organic substance selected from the group consisting of sphagnum and peat, wherein the organic substance substitutes the mineral wool for up to 20 volume %.

Claim 19. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 12, further comprising clay, substituting the mineral wool for up to about 20 volume %.

Claim 20. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 12, for use as a growing block.

Claim 21. (Previously Presented): A growing mat comprising the substrate of claim 12.

Claim 22. (Currently Amended): A substrate comprising a coherent matrix of mineral wool, a cured binder, a pre-determined amount of clay and a pre-determined amount of an organic substance, substituting the mineral wool for up to 20 volume %, wherein the coherent matrix is formed by collecting a layer of mineral wool fibers that is cured by the binder, said cured binder fixing the fibers to one another so that they are substantially not displaceable relative to one another.

Claim 23. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 22, wherein the organic substance is selected from the group consisting of sphagnum and peat.

Claim 24. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 15, wherein the ion-exchange agent has a stable zeolite, cage-like structure.

Claim 25. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent has an ion-exchange capacity of about 30 meq/100g dry weight.

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Claim 26. (Previously Presented): The substrate according to claim 12, wherein the ion-exchange agent has an ion-exchange capacity of about 40 meq/100g dry weight.

Claim 27. (Canceled)